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POETRY, AS A FINE ART:

BEING

THE UNIVERSITY LECTURE

OF

McGILL COLLEGE,

FOR THE SESSION 1881-2,

DELIVERED BY

CHARLES E. MOYSE, B.A. (LOND.)

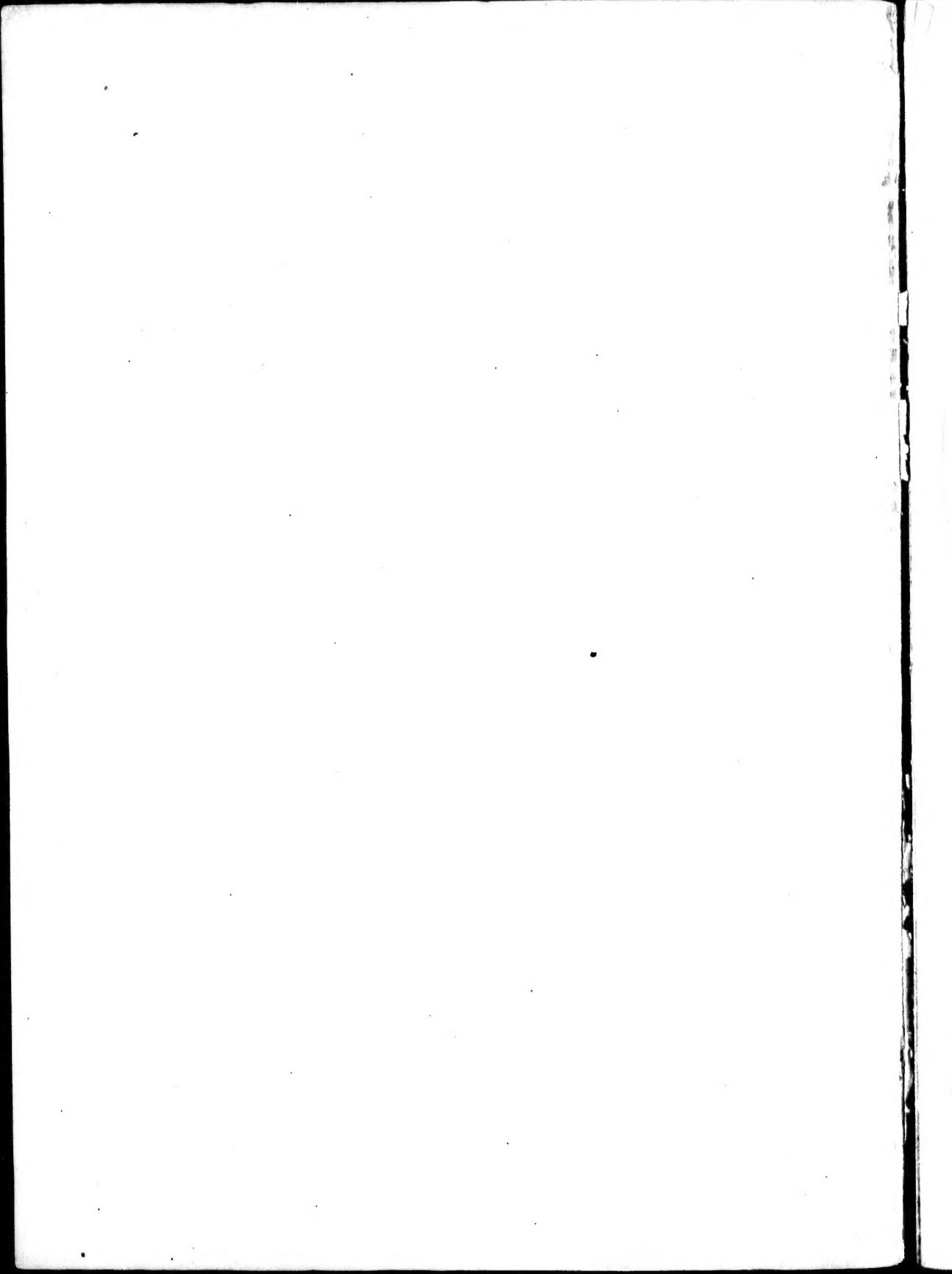
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SYNOPSIS.

By way of Preface, various objections to the analysis of poetical emotion are considered—It is difficult to distinguish between the characteristics common to all poetry, and the peculiarities of the individual poet—Contrast between the two leading theories regarding the characteristics of all poetry—The poet is a maker of images—The three kinds of images—Experience (under various names) furnishes all images—These images are subject to the law of Association of Ideas—This law explains parallelism of structure in different works—It explains, also, the trains of thought in the individual—The nature of the poet, on the individual side, illustrated by Wordsworth, Keats, and Scott.

Blessings be with them—and eternal praise,
Who gave us nobler loves, and nobler cares—
The Poets, who on earth have made us heirs,
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays.—*Wordsworth.*

POETRY, AS A FINE ART.

THE oft-quoted lines of Horace,

Tractas et incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso,

emphatically warn the adventurer who essays the theme, "Poetry, as a Fine Art." It would be mere arrogance in him to imagine that he might found a new doctrine ; it would savour of conceit if he affirmed that his thoughts on such a topic were always clear and logical. Minds richly gifted with analytical power have attempted to lay bare the exact nature of poetry itself and of its artistic expression, but, although a large measure of truth has attended their enquiries, the results are incomplete and, in some essential particulars, conflicting. If, then, men whom the world everywhere honours have felt the instability of the ground they have tried to explore, ordinary people will act wisely in following beaten tracks.

One often hears many objections urged against the study of poetry on account of its unpractical character, as if every mental effort, unless it brought direct mercenary gain to the educator or to the man of business, were without any real value. But if this mean, though not uncommon, aspect of the matter be disregarded, and the noblest aim of life, the culture of the intellect, considered, it must be owned that while many subjects are more conclusive than poetry, viewed as one of the Fine Arts, few are more profitable, none more suggestive. Sometimes the argument takes another form. It is maintained that the paths of investigation are neither far-reaching nor new ; still they reach far enough to display a novel world of beauty to him who will tread them, and it is often apparent that they are unseen by the captious or indolent ; dimly seen by the hasty ; clearly seen, if clearness there can be, only by the trustful and studious. The foregoing objections hardly merit sober consideration, but the superficial and erroneous idea that to dissect poetry and poets in a so-called chilly, unemotional

way is to degrade them, asks for a longer word. Enquiry into the nature of the truly great or truly beautiful does not diminish respect but heightens it, and in course of time respect becomes devotion of which knowledge, not ignorance, is the mother. In the New Testament comparison is made between the lilies of the field and Solomon in all his glory, and the Psalmist on one occasion breaks forth into triumphant song, "I will praise Thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." To whom does the contrast between the gorgeous king and the meek flower come home with greater force? To the ignorant hind who regards a lily as a lily and nothing more, or to him whose eye has marked the wonders that lilies reveal? Who feels the force of the truth that he is fearfully and wonderfully made? He that vapours platitude about the human frame, or he that knows of the exquisite delicacy and beauty of the nerve scales in the internal ear? What men neither see nor at all know they cannot venerate, except in worthless name which does not lead to act. A writer on Constitutional History laments that Magna Charta is on everybody's lips but in nobody's hands. The general sense of his remark is true in regard to poetry and poets. That knowledge which begets reverence, leading in its turn to a higher life, is not the outcome of fitful dalliance with fragmentary thought. People in this critical age must affect the critic if nothing else, and one often sees and hears things that cost no trouble in the acquiring save an indifferent scamper through a review, perhaps indifferent also, or a desultory perusal of literary odds and ends. It is not we who are kings and poets who are vassals, craving an earnest audience of a few minutes, only to be treated with apathy when they do gain it: they are monarchs; we, subjects, who may, if we please, never go to court all our lives, never know anything royal, anything worthy of homage, never catch any kingly speech as we wander self-satisfied among our fellows, unless in some crisis it thunders past making us turn and ask whence it cometh and whither it goeth. When we say we love poetry and honour poets, we ought to mean that ours is the reward of humble, undivided endeavour according to such light as each possesses.

Milton, in a brief play of emotion, one of the few which lend rhetorical dignity to a finished specimen of dialectic fine art, the *Areopagitica*, might have been thinking of the broad aspect of the question before us when he writes: "And yet on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's Image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." His language, eloquent in its simplicity, seems to refer to poetry in especial; for poetry, of all things, represents the vital part of the poet. It lays bare the inmost workings of the poet's mind and, by so doing, discloses the universal attributes of the poet's nature. Wanton cavil might perhaps deny that such attributes exist, but a little serious thought gives tacit consent to the belief, nor does it seem much more difficult to grant this,—that combined with what is common, as if by some subtle intellectual chemistry, lie the peculiarities of the mental growth, maturity, and decay of the individual. If, therefore, merely partial truth about the essentials of all poetry can be learned, something of the apparent mystery which separates the poet from his fellow men may be known; or if, to use equivalent words, some only of the distinctive depths of every poet's mind can be fathomed, then may its work be partly explained.

From the treatment of generalities such as these, one would naturally be led to talk about the characteristics marking the individual, and it might seem that in the discussion of this part of the subject the claim of poetry to be regarded as one of the Fine Arts should be vindicated. Undoubtedly; but thus to limit the domain of the poet, or artist, would be at variance with the general tone of this lecture, which does not seek to draw a hard and fast line between the universal and the particular. The poet's artistic skill is often spoken of as if it were confined to the prettinesses or the filagree-work of rhythm and rime. The vague language which tells of inspiration, of genius, and is therewith satisfied, lends

itself to such an idea, but it cribs and confines what appears to be truth. Are not poets men of genius and inspired? Of course, when one is told what genius and inspiration are, or are not. To utter words for words' sake is not acting altogether righteously. Point out clearly the essentials of genius; say, if you will, that genius is the power of using the materials common to all as but very few can use them and show *how* they are used; or say that the genius of a poet is the faculty which avoids the commonplace, the ridiculous, the unrefined, and thereupon indicate the rare, the sublime, the polished, and discuss their character, but do not take refuge in unmeaning sound. No mind can entirely explain any other ordinary mind, still less the mind of a poet, but "inspiration and genius," half bid men fold their hands and cease from attempting to solve a psychological problem, because psychology can never yield a complete answer. Poets are men of a larger mental growth than the multitude, but they suffer experiences which fall to the lot of people generally. The best of them display an immense quantity of sober knowledge: the majority of them do not rave at midnight, or speak in unknown tongues of unknowable things, or madly indulge in dangerous stimulants to quicken their flagging pulses. They write with a calm consciousness of strength—often patiently, carefully, even toilfully, and their work rewards them by winning perpetual admiration.

Nothing has been said in the way of a definition of Fine Art, nor need this preliminary matter detain us long. The poet works with certain materials, and is therefore an artificer. The result of his work is not the purely useful, which serves momentary convenience or brings direct practical advantage to those who avail themselves of it: the poet creates the ornamental, and appeals to our emotions, as an *artist*. Lastly, he seeks to move the deepest and noblest parts of our being; his Art is one of *the* Arts, is a Fine Art, and ranks with sculpture and painting. We are concerned to-day with its nature and method.

One of the first systematic attempts to determine the nature and define the scope of Poetry was made by Aristotle, whose theory some still regard as essentially true. Lessing assumes it

to be trustworthy in his *Laocoön*, a work which, although fragmentary and limited by individual prejudice, is the most valuable contribution of modern thought to the settlement of the legitimate domain of the sculptor and the poet. Aristotle wishes to establish that Poetry is a Mimetic or Imitative Art, and the outlines of his argument run in this wise : Poetry in general, seems to have derived its origin from two *causes*, each *natural*. The first cause is *imitation*, which is instinctive in man. Man is distinguished from other animals in being the most imitative of them all. Man naturally derives pleasure from imitation, and the more exact the imitation the greater is that pleasure. The second cause, likewise natural, is *Harmony* and *Rhythm*. *Harmony* and *Rhythm* are the *means* by which in the case of Poetry the imitation is presented to others ; just as in Sculpture imitation is presented by means of figure, in Painting by means of colour and form, in Music by means of melody and rhythm, in Dancing by means of rhythm only. From statements of this character, Aristotle proceeds to enquire into the *objects* of poetic imitation. These, he says, are the actions of men.

Before bringing Aristotle's theory to the test, let me ask you to listen to a modern thinker in low life. It is true he dismisses the matter briefly, although he speaks with much assurance. He does not pretend to argument or to exactitude. His ruling idea is physical comfort ; his mental gifts he thinks superior to those of his fellows, and if his powers of extempore versifying be challenged, he can let loose a flood of rhyme "foreight years together, dinners, suppers and sleeping time excepted." These words betray him—Touchstone, the wisest of Shakespeare's clowns, an intensely self-conscious philosopher of the common-sense school, in the disguise of motley :—

TOUCHSTONE—(*Glancing down half pitifully, half contemptuously*), Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

AUDREY—(*Looking up with rustic innocence and amaze*), I do not know what 'poetical' is : is it honest in deed and word ? is it a true thing ?

TOUCH.—No, truly ; for the truest poetry is the most feigning ; and lovers are given to poetry, and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign.

AUD.—Do you wish then that the gods had made me poetical ?

TOUCH.—I do, truly ; for thou swearst to me thou art honest : now, if thou wert a poet, I might have some hope thou didst feign.

Touchstone and Aristotle represent extremes. Touchstone stands at the negative pole of thought ; Aristotle at the positive. Aristotle declares that poetry is based upon imitation and the more exact the imitation the better the poetry ; Touchstone, that poetry is based upon feigning, and the more pronounced the feigning the truer the poet. Is either of these views complete and correct, or is each only reliable in part ?

The more exact the imitation the greater the pleasure. Why, then, do poets sometimes suggest so much and describe so little ? When they affect the emotions strongly, they often do so in a brief way. If they desire to bring their ideal of beauty before the reader, the greatest of them seem conscious of the limits of their power and shrink from crossing into the domain of the minutely exact. They know that types of perfection are never identical ; that two men of the same nation, perchance of similar mental tone and acquirements, are at variance concerning what they believe to be most beautiful or admirable, and again, that in the case of various nations the difference is even more strongly marked. Consciously or unconsciously poets obey the law that extension is narrowed as intension is deepened, although Lessing's reason for this poetical moderation lays stress on rapidity of execution, lest the mind be hopelessly confused by a mass of detail. It may be argued that the same poet does not write for Teuton and Ethiop alike, yet he appeals to wide discrepancies of thought. Aphrodite, with her hair "golden round her lucid throat and shoulder," has one set of worshippers ; Cleopatra, "with swarthy cheeks and bold black eyes," another. The poet, however, may, if he wishes, neglect likes and dislikes. He has only to set men a-thinking ; by suggestion he can cause special embodiments of beauty to flash before minds which have very little in common.

Lessing selects Greek literature as rich in this peculiarity, but our own readily answers to appeal. One of the most forcible examples is to be found in Christopher Marlowe's Faustus. Faustus gives both body and soul to Lucifer, in return for twenty-four years of pleasure. A part of his delight is to have the famous persons of antiquity brought before him. He asks to see Helen

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of Greece a second time. She appears and Faustus utters the well-known lines :—

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

That is all! An effect, not a description; and yet its suggestive force is hard to match. Had Marlowe made the eye of Faustus play the painter, how would he have failed! Nowhere does he attempt to depict Helen accurately: she is "fairer than the evening air," "brighter than flaming Jupiter;" the rest is untold. Again, Milton describes, or rather does not describe, a very different being—Death :—

The other Shape—

If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either—black it stood as Night,
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
And shook a dreadful dart: what seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.

Some poets, then, do not imitate carefully; and regarding those who make the attempt, necessarily imperfect, Lessing ventures a very suggestive remark, for which he has won much credit. The force of description, he says, lies where poetry shows its distinctive character as contrasted with sculpture. Sculpture represents still life; it chooses one moment of impulse—the moment best adapted to the end in view. Poetry represents a number of acts in successive moments, and motion is of its essence. When beauty passes into motion—Lessing's definition of charm—the poet can be felt. The mouth of Ariosto's Alcina, in Orlando Furioso, enraptures not because it takes six lines to describe it, but because in the final couplet we are told that there is formed that lovely smile which in itself already opens a paradise upon earth. We may hesitate to accept Aristotle's theory, then, although it may have some truth in it: let us bring into contrast the opinions of Francis, Lord Bacon, in the *Advancement of Learning*.

"The parts of human learning have reference to the three parts of Man's understanding, which is the seat of learning: History to his Memory, Poesy to his Imagination and Philosophy to his Reason." "Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words for

the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the Imagination; *which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined; and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things.*"

In Shakespeare's rich language:—

The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:

* * * * *

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth,
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Let us again take a specimen of English verse, and, with Bacon's theory fresh in the memory, see what it may be made to yield. Wordsworth says of Lucy:—

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.

We note that Wordsworth selects just as Marlowe and Milton did, for there is no attempt to describe, to imitate, to set forth exactly by means of harmony and rhythm, the sum of Lucy's physical excellence. A thousand things might have caused Lucy to seem divine to the poet, but of the thousand, only three are visible—at least to me—modesty and conspicuous beauty *plus* purity:—

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!—(*Modesty.*)
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky.—(*Beauty + Purity.*)

The words modesty, beauty, purity, do not occur, it is true, but their poetical equivalents stand in the verse with quiet strength—a violet and a star. The violet and the star are *images*—metaphors, as the grammarian would call them. It may be repeated, then, that the poet does not imitate exactly; he selects: it may now be added that the objects of his selection are images; and that such images as he selects are those he deems most strong or most beautiful. The poet is a thinker in images: the historian,

the philosopher, the ordinary man are thinkers in propositions. In Job XIV, 10, we read: "But man dieth and wasteth away." No elocution can raise that into poetry. It is a terribly earnest statement, and its force lies in its overwhelming truth. The idea, or an idea akin to it, crosses the mind of the poet and the proposition—universal and categorical in terms of logic—is converted into a series of images:—

Fair daffodils, we weep to see
 You haste away so soon ;
 As yet the early rising sun
 Has not attain'd his noon.
 Stay, stay,
 Until the hastening day
 Has run
 But to the even song ;
 And, having pray'd together, we
 Will go with you along.

We have short time to stay as you,
 We have as short a spring ;
 As quick a growth to meet decay,
 As you or any thing.
 We die
 As your hours do, and dry
 Away,
 Like to the summer's rain ;
 Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
 Ne'er to be found again.—*Robert Herrick.*

The poet's images may be divided into two great classes; those which are existent and are not altered when poetically treated, but are used in their entirety and separately: Secondly, those which are existent only in part, and are modified and compounded to suit the poet's aim. The first class may be subdivided into images which are natural and apt—which do not provoke question or smile; and into images which are unnatural and inapt—images which puzzle or suggest the ludicrous. The stanza from Wordsworth will exemplify the natural and true, used in entirety:—

A violet by a mossy stone
 Half hidden from the eye !
 Fair as a star when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

Any gatherer of way-side flowers will bear witness to the faithfulness of the first two lines: to the faithfulness of the second, any man who has gazed at Hesperus, the leader of the midnight host,

beaming clear and alone in the evening heaven. The translation of modesty and beauty *plus* purity into image is so well done that the goal of poetry, the heart, is reached without conscious effort, and we exclaim "That is poetry"—we hardly know why, until we begin to cast about for a reason.

The next sub-class, the unnatural and inapt, or at least grotesque, runs riot in a large portion of our literature, most of which is unknown save to the curious. Writers termed Later Euphuists, that is, Euphuists who lived after all that was noble in Euphuism had died away, did their best, or rather their worst, to find ingenuities of thought—conceits, as they are technically called. And these conceits connected objects or images that have no natural link. Earlier Euphuism could boast of sterling thought, even if "conceited." Later Euphuism is scarcely anything else except absurd pedantry. And yet we must believe that these men honestly thought they were writing durable verse ; they had the faculty of making others think so, for Dryden writes,—"I remember when I was a boy, I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's Du Bartas, and was wrapt into an ecstasy when I read these lines :—

Now, when the winter's keener breath began
To crystallize the Baltic Ocean,
To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,
And periwig with snow the bald-pate woods.'

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian, that is, thoughts and words ill-sorted, and without the least relation to each other." The following are fair examples of Euphuistic genius. A lady's heart is a powder magazine—a stubborn powder magazine—her lover's a hand-grenado. The dealer in "conceit," belabours his brains until he has gathered up the fragments of an explosion, and from them created a new heart, which the charitable will hope may remain entire for ever. A traveller and his wife suggest a pair of compasses. The traveller is the moving, the wife the fixed foot. The Euphuistic puzzle is worked out in this fashion by John Donne :—

Our two souls, therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so,
 As stiff twin compasses are two ;
 The soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth if th' other do.
 And, though it in the centre sit ;
 Yet, when the other far doth roam,
 It leans and harkens after it,
 And grows erect as that comes home.
 Such wilt thou be to me, who must
 Like th' other foot obliquely run.
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end where I begun.

Euphuistic poets were numerous ; but there were also Euphuistic fencers. Sir Thomas Urquhart speaks approvingly of the Admirable Crichton, because, when fighting a duel with a gentleman who had previously killed three opponents, the famous Scot wounded his adversary in three points, which, if joined, would be found to lie at the angles of a perfect isosceles triangle.

The second class of images comprises those which are modified, blended, or compounded to suit the poet's aim. The *complex* result never had any existence, save in thought. Such images abound in the realm of the supernatural, where dwell a thousand creations :—

All monstrous, all prodigious things,
 Abominable, inutterable and worse
 Than fables yet have feigned or fear conceived,
 Gorgons, and Hydras, and Chimæras dire.

Here, says the critic, is the well-head of inspiration, that sacred dower into the nature of which it were profane to inquire ; here the *mens divinior*, the divine fire. Granted : it is almost divine for very few mortals possess it, but it is not all a mystery. Addison strikes a true note in his papers on the Imagination. (Spectators 411-421.) "We cannot indeed," he writes, "have a single image in the Fancy that did not make its first entrance through the sight ; but we have the power of retaining, altering and compounding those images, which we have once received, into all the varieties of picture and vision that are most agreeable to the Imagination." If we raise these statements to the level of modern psychology, and, instead of sight, read all the senses by which men gain experience, adding to them hereditary endowment, we shall gain a further insight into the matter. Dissect or analyse a Gorgon, a

Hydra, a Chimæra dire, and in so far as they are concrete they can be dissected or analysed, and it will be found that each part, each element of the compound, is a fact or an image known to many.

The experiences of men and of poets have much in common. Birth, growth, decay, death—opinions or notions about these are very much alike in all cases. The success to which we aspire, the mischances that cross our path are things of the multitude and the trains of thought to which they give rise in different persons travel in parallel lines for a long distance often, because they are governed by a universal law, the Association of Ideas. Now this law governs not only the notions of poets but also their translation of those notions into images. Let us view the question from the notional side first, for this notional side will display what may be called the artistic setting or moulding of poems as a whole.

Milton, Shelley and Tennyson, write on the death of friends, Milton in *Lycidas*, Shelley in *Adonais*, Tennyson in *In Memoriam*. The great outlines of each work are such as would pass through the minds of ordinary men similarly afflicted. All the mourners introduce themselves; all look back to the happy days of intimacy before death; all, when wild grief sways them in the early hours of bereavement, view death as an end; all think of the fame the departed might have won, had they lived; all rise to a belief in Immortality; all picture the beloved spirits in the world of bliss.

So with the imagery. Milton and Shelley make conventional appeal to those who might have averted the blow, and it will be noticed that each appeal is in harmony with particular fate. Edward King was drowned; John Keats died of consumption. Milton writes:—

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved *Lycidas*?

and Shelley:—

Where wert thou, mighty Mother, when he lay,
When thy son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies
In darkness? where was lorn Urania
When *Adonais* died?

Again, Milton tolls the poet's bell. Three times it rings out solemn and clear at the beginning of his poem,

For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for *Lycidas*?

Shelley does the same with more subtlety and more frequently :—

I weep for *Adonais*—he is dead !
 Oh, weep for *Adonais* ! though our tears
 Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head !
 And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
 To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
 And teach them their own sorrow ; say : With me,
 Died *Adonais*.—

The images of the poet are often coloured with the fashion of the age, and this is the last point I can now notice of many to which both Milton and Shelley bear witness. The two men write in pastoral form ; before they become poets they don shepherd's garb and roam in an ideal Arcadia, which hundreds have entered from mere conventionality. Dr. Samuel Johnson whose wayward robustness blinded him to the finer lights and shades both of poetry and of philosophy, blames Milton for speaking of mourner and mourned as driving their flocks a-field. Milton obeyed an artistic dictum already losing force in his day, and Shelley was induced by natural bent and by imagery, in which even his generation indulged, to picture himself as one of a band of idyllic mourners, to bind his head with pansies and violets, and to carry a spear tipped with cypress and garlanded with ivy. Tennyson, for reasons we may not now discuss, shrinks from making prominent Corydon and Thyrus and their rustic belongings—herds, sheep-hooks, posies, and oaten pipes.

But not only will the law of Association of Ideas, explain similarity of notional framing in different poets ; it will also throw light on the trains of thought, and consequently of imagery, in the complete poems of the individual. If justification of the foregoing remark be demanded, it will be found, time and again, in the Sonnet. Here we are presented with matter, rich, varied and beautiful ; moreover, the sonnet possesses one inestimable advantage, brevity,—it can be kept before the mind as a whole, during analysis. The objection that the sonnet is hyper-artificial carries but little weight, for in the sonnet is embodied some of the finest and strongest poetry in our language. The laws which sonneteers must obey, may be briefly phrased thus : firstly, the sonnet must not exceed fourteen lines in length ; secondly, certain restrictions

are to be observed in regard to measure and rime ; thirdly, the sonnet is to consist of two parts, the first of eight lines, the second of six ; these must be blended in thought ; and lastly, if the worker copies the purest model, he must avoid a final couplet. Now, if we leave form and examine matter, we observe the art of the poet and his exemplification of the law which governs ideas. In the first eight lines he brings forward and expands a dominant image or a series of images ; in the succeeding part he applies, often with a deepening moral tone, such image or images to the idea or ideas that gave them birth, and at the end swells out into poetic diapason.

It must not be supposed that every sonnet shows this arrangement of feeling, but many, and among them the best, are regulated by it. Longfellow has written a series of four sonnets on Dante's Divine Comedy. The first serves as a general introduction ; the other three preface the sections of the poem. We will briefly analyse the first. Dominant *idea*—Dante's Divine Comedy and the Inferno as its commencement ; dominant *image*, a cathedral, preserved in all the poems : sub-dominant image, a labourer, (Longfellow himself). The first eight lines are occupied in the adornment of these *selected* images with *selected* epithets and environments ; the concluding six, with their application to the idea in question, and blended with the application is the gradual swell of the moral tone.

Images. [Oft have I seen at some cathedral door
 (1) A labourer, pausing in the dust and heat,
 (2) Lay down his burden, and with reverent feet
 Enter, and cross himself, and on the floor
 Kneel (3) to repeat his paternoster o'er ;
 Far off the noises (4) of the world retreat ;
 The loud vociferations of the street
 Become an undistinguishable roar.

Application. [So, as I (1) enter here from day to day,
 And leave (2) my burden at this minster gate,
 Kneeling (3) in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
 The tumult of the (4) time disconsolate
 To inarticulate murmurs dies away
 While the eternal ages watch and wait. [Diapason.]

The law of Association of Ideas can be traced not only in sonnets but also in nearly all good poetic work. Shelley and Keats are a mine of image-wealth, and a small portion of their

richest writing could be enlarged by true commentary to an almost indefinite extent. Shelley's Ode to the West Wind—from the creative point of view, the finest in our literature—is one grand series of associated images. A man gifted with artistic skill of an inferior kind might take many a line thence as the dominant image of a sonnet, and so, by elaboration, make a little volume. Let me endeavour to find the main idea-path through Shelley's Skylark. At eventide the bird begins to ascend ; it is like a cloud of fire in the *blue* deep ; then it flies westward to the *golden* lightning of the sunken sun, then on through the pale *purple* even until it is as a star in the daylight—invisible : three stanzas with motion predominant. Since motion can no longer be dwelt on, its consequence, invisibility, forms the main theme. The star invisible suggests the moon, invisible ; the invisible moon, a striking effect of cloudy moonlight ; cloudy moonlight, the gorgeous colour-effect of rainbow clouds—these effects being set to the key-note of the poem, the bird's song. Then succeed four conspicuous images, the remains of perhaps a score, with invisibility or deep seclusion running through all :—

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought.

Like a high born maiden
In a palace tower.

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew.

Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves.

In the complete stanzas it will be found that these images of seclusion are blended with sound, colour, odour ; sound, the keynote, again becomes predominant ; the nature of the bird's song is considered, its object, its influence. This element gets more pronounced towards the close until the poem ends with the note of its commencement :—

Hail to thee, blithe spirit !
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourrest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

* * * * *
Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,

Better than all treasures
 That in books are found,
 Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground !

Teach me half the gladness
 That thy brain must know,
 Such harmonious madness
 From my lips would flow,
 The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

I cannot pass from this interesting corner of my subject without referring to the light that the same image throws upon the poet's consistency of mood, even when it appears in disconnected poems. Wordsworth likens the maid who grew beside the springs of Dove, to a star :—

Fair as a star, when only one
 Is shining in the sky.

When writing elsewhere of a poet whose death he regards as a national loss, and with whose moral nature he had profound sympathy, his mind crosses the old path. One line of the trumpet-tongued sonnet to Milton reads :—

Thy soul was like a *star* and dwelt apart.

This is neither accident nor wilful repetition. Similar experiences give rise to similar trains of thought ; similar trains of thought, to similar imagery. Wordsworth is rich in the verification of what might be termed a law. Poets obey it in varying degree, and Wordsworth, perhaps, more than others, owing to his subjective attitude and method of composing verse. The second part of one of his best known sonnets aptly concludes the present topic :—

Methinks their very names shine still and bright ;
 Apart—like glow-worms on a summer night ;
 Or lonely tapers when from far they fling
 A guiding ray ; or seen—like stars on high,
 Satellites burning in a lucid ring
 Around meek Walton's heavenly memory.

So far we have briefly discussed selection of images, themselves linked in thought. The dependence of these upon experience has also been insisted on ; but there goes hand in hand with experience, which may be regarded as in a great degree passive, the active search for knowledge, in short, education. A young author's first literary loves give form and impulse to his growing

ideas ; their influence never loses its hold upon him, a fact of which he is sometimes morbidly conscious. It was, doubtless, to prevent an imputation of plagiarism that Cowper avoided reading the classical English poets, (an occasional perusal of one sufficed him during twenty years), and that Byron did not possess, according to Leigh Hunt, either a Shakespeare or a Milton ; yet Cowper imitated Churchill, Byron read widely, and adored Pope. A glance at the works of great poets, or a knowledge of their lives, shows that, in more than one instance, their greatness is in part due to arduous study.

Natural propensity, experience, and education lead poets to choose special departments of thought. We now approach the individuality of which I have already spoken. Since Wordsworth, Keats, and Scott can be brought into marked, as well as pleasing contrast, it will be profitable to examine the imaginative bent of each.

A violet by a mossy stone,
Half hidden from the eye !
Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

One of the first things worthy of note in regard to the verse is its quietness. These lines of Wordsworth refuse to lend themselves to imposing sound. They cannot be mouthed into anything great or made to tickle the ear, as do classic rhythms quite familiar to many of my hearers. The short poem on Lucy—only three verses in all—may well serve as a model of simple workmanship, a most loyal piece of English, put together with Saxon craft. And this simplicity is the result of a deep conviction held by their maker. The language of poetry he maintains to be that of common men. Two causes prevent it from becoming vulgar or mean—selection made with taste and feeling, to which is added metre. One is sometimes told, in a very confident way, that Wordsworth is at his strongest and best when he departs from his rule. In the argument general issues are seldom kept clearly in sight. Fairness demands that appeal be made to Wordsworth as a whole, in order to compare him with other writers, or to vindicate him by balancing his own work, part against part. What

in him is beautifully florid, if anything of his can be called so, may be outmatched by the beautifully simple. He may and does maulder in childish simplicity, but, at the same time, he can and does use the speech of children with unaffected majesty.

The next feature that these lines present is still more important. The images are selected from Nature. Wordsworth gives his reasons for following Nature in the Prelude, where lie the keys which unlock the secrets of his philosophy. Man and man's achievements pass away, but Nature abideth still ; that was a cardinal belief of our poet, and it is, in essence, true. Fashion and fashionables die and are forgotten, together with those who pay them homage in verse. Violets and stars have long existed and are likely to remain long. People of many climes, of different habits of thought, of diverse modes of life, can be aroused by emotion which touches objects they all see. Wigs, powder, paint, patches, rapiers, and the voluminous literature of the eighteenth century are not near to our hearts now : they are viewed in distant perspective by those who will put on the spectacles of learning to behold them. What of humanity can be discovered there we yet honour, but we turn away from an "understanding age," which condemned the soliloquies of Shakespeare, as having less meaning and expression than "the neighing of a horse," or the "growling of a mastiff," because "correct" taste thus decreed. The practical geniality which the sixteenth century manifested now and again, when it looked on the face of Nature, the nineteenth caught in its own way, and used, in the case of Wordsworth, with different aim. But to return to the Prelude and its bearing on the point under discussion. Toward the close of Book XIII, the slow growing belief of the poet in regard to the stability of Nature and its effect on the mind is expressed in these lines :—

Also, about this time did I receive
 Convictions still more strong than heretofore,
 Not only that the inner frame is good,
 And graciously composed, but that, no less,
 Nature for all conditions wants not power
 To consecrate, if we have eyes to see
 The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
 Grandeur upon the very humblest face
 Of human life. I felt that the array

Of act and circumstance, and visible form,
 Is mainly to the pleasure of the mind
 What passion makes them ; that meanwhile the forms
 Of Nature have a passion in themselves,
 That intermingles with those works of man
 To which she summons him ; although the works
 Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own ;
And that the Genius of the Poet hence
May boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads ; that he hath stood
By Nature's side among the men of old,
And so shall stand for ever.

As I am talking about Wordsworth, there are two matters I feel it in my heart to mention, although they do not bear with their whole weight on the criticism of the verse about Lucy. We are frequently reminded that Wordsworth is the poet of Nature. The man who is content with this idea alone has scarcely planted his foot on the first round of the Wordsworthian ladder. Wordsworth's contemporaries wrote about Nature also, and faithfully ; yet, in surveying the landscapes of Thomson or of Cowper, there is a kind of aloofness on our part, unfelt when reading Wordsworth. Their colours are skilfully laid on, albeit cold in tone, and there is a just idea of perspective : still the general effect works its way to one pole of thought, and our critical faculties to the other. Wordsworth's poetry, however, has a quiet, subtle, penetrative force which refuses the criticism of minutiae. His music is pitched in Nature's key, but it is blended with melody deeper far : Nature leads up to man, especially to the best part of him, his moral side, for there, hidden within accretions, fair and foul, rest the seeds of progress. Nature is not, in the eyes of Wordsworth, an elaborate picture gallery. A fox-glove, for example, is not a poetical prize, every tint and turn whereof is to be set before a background chosen with care, that the stately stem and head may be thrown forward into just relief. Its bells are made to fall on the highway, and are brought into connection with humanity, when they amuse the children of a vagrant mother. "A smooth rock wet with constant springs" lies bathed in the rays of the declining sun, and its brilliancy is as the lustre of a knight's shield awakening ideas of chivalry, or as an entrance into a fairy-haunted cave. (Prelude, Book III.) Here again we have the

passing from mental stillness to mental life, from the world of mere sensation to the world of thought. Wordsworth did not uniformly regard the English lake-country as full of beautiful yet lonely hill-sides, over which light and shade played with varying effect ; to him it was a region teeming with imaginative life. When, therefore, Professor Masson, in a truly admirable essay on Theories of Poetry, says that Wordsworth is in literature what the pre-Raphaelites are in Art, his epigrammatic way of stating the case carries with it only the partial truth of all epigram. Wordsworth was one of an increasing throng, who respected "pre-Drydenism" (pre-Gallicism is a better word), but from the realistic standpoint, pure and simple, he was not more, often less, pronounced than his fellows. The pre-Raphaelite or pre-Drydenite fox-glove occupies six lines ; the Wordsworthian fox-glove, eight ; the pre-Raphaelite or pre-Drydenite rock, four ; the Wordsworthian rock, nine. Language such as I have used may seem to sacrifice truth to effect, but the test just indicated may be applied fearlessly to Wordsworth as a whole.

In the second place, I should like to say a little about Wordsworth's philosophy. Wordsworth has suffered much from critics, ever since the days of the Rejected Addresses, and of Lord Jeffrey's famous verdict on the Excursion, "This will never do." Numerous ephemeral reviews, written from a hostile standpoint, and not seldom as flippant as they are superficial, may be allowed to pass in silence, but when Mr. Matthew Arnold in an article published some time ago in Macmillan's Magazine and subsequently prefixed to a collection of Wordsworth's best pieces, declares that their author's poetry is the reality, and his philosophy the illusion some sort of reply will not be out of place even here. It is only fair to ask what is meant by philosophy. If Mr. Matthew Arnold expects to find in Wordsworth a nicely-squared philosophical system, perfect down to the minutest detail, of course he will be disappointed. As surely as a poet assumes the rigid metaphysician, so surely will his emotional warmth vanish in the coldness of didactics. In fact he renounces the most important characteristic of poetry, already alluded to at some length, and has to depend on the graces of form

for lasting recognition. But although a poet is necessarily limited in regard to scientific method, he can be philosophical, just as every man is to some extent, when he allows himself to be guided by principle, without avowing professed metaphysic. It would have been vastly more to the point had the critic taken other poems of our literature whose cast is ethically didactic, and by comparison proved Wordsworth's illusory nature. Philosophy, in Mr. Matthew Arnold's eyes, seems to have but one meaning—the specific meaning of the schools, and appropriate when the elasticity and humanizing tendency of Literature are weighed against the rigidity and the not unfrequent inhumanity of over-wrought Dogma. Yet Wordsworth if not painfully minute is logical, both in the Prelude and the Excursion, confessedly a fragment. The Prelude relates to the mental growth of the individual; the Excursion considers the behaviour of the individual when brought face to face with the problems of society. It is true that the society is eminently quiet and retired, but it will be observed how deeply the one event of Wordsworth's time—the French Revolution—moves the villagers in the seclusion of their native hills. And as the Prelude lies at the base of Wordsworthian thinking, allow me to point out a *few* of its cardinal points, which are sufficiently logical to appeal to those who are not over-fond of syllogism. Wordsworth is impressed by the world of Nature which lies before the gaze of all; the impression deepens into love; the love becomes absorbing and Nature is adored *for her own sake*; intercourse with men provokes the feeling that the love of Nature is not absolutely the greatest love—it leads up to the love of man; the two loves are to be reciprocal, are to play the one into the other; the love of Nature is not to be mistrusted, for Nature in her moods of silence and her scenes of awe, is stable, is a guide man can always follow; the majesty of Nature awakens in a mind accustomed to survey tamer landscapes, a creative power—the man becomes a poet; the poet, like other men, may boldly take his way whithersoever Nature leads, without doubt as to his future fame; lastly, the poet trained to observe Nature's myriad changes will not require any abnormal mental excitement to quicken poetry. Fourteen

books to prove such commonplace ! It is so common that we forget its share of truth, and if any of my hearers will read the Prelude for himself, he will there discover very many points which time forbids me to mention. Instead of poetry being the reality and philosophy the illusion, both are realities, and, in the crowning works of genius, dramatic and other, they are, in so far as they can be, mutual helps. In Memoriam is one of the finest and most emotional poems in English—a pretty piece of mosaic, cast in philosophical figure, put together by a mind striving to express in it philosophy not only abstract but also fully abreast with our age. Take that element from it and then perhaps Mr. Matthew Arnold will declare the purblind critique of M. Taine just.

Keats manifests individuality of another nature. His deepest belief is,

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ that is all
Ye know on earth and all ye need to know.

And so the thought and, in consequence, the imagery of Keats refer for the most part to the artistically beautiful. Keats lived away from the turmoil of his generation. Its revolutionary throes he neither witnessed nor sympathized with, as a poet. Wordsworth put a stone of the Bastile into his pocket ; Coleridge and Southey dreamed of ideal republics ; Campbell was so stricken down at the news of Warsaw's fall as to be in jeopardy of his life—Polish newspapers printed in large type, “The gratitude of our nation is due to Thomas Campbell”—Poland herself sent a clod of earth from Kosciusko's grave to be cast into Campbell's tomb as a tribute of love ; Shelley threw political tracts from a window in Dublin that Ireland might be bettered ; Byron joined the Italian Carbonari and fell in the cause of Greek liberty. But the spirit of these men never found an abiding place in the soul of Keats. He indulges in no ethical moralizing, worthy of the name. Moreover, Keats views antiquity not as an incentive to future endeavour or as historically interesting.

Hence, pageant history ! hence, gilded cheat !
Swart planet in the universe of deeds !
Wide sea, that one continuous murmur breeds
Along the pebbled shore of memory !

Many old rotten-timber'd boats there be
 Upon thy vaporous bosom, magnified,
 To goodly vessels ; many a sail of pride,
 And golden-keel'd is left unlauch'd and dry.

To Keats the value of the past is its love of the beautiful in art. Light falls on a Grecian urn and reveals its "leaf-fringed legend" with classic distinctness. Keats' eye dwells on that, and bending forward with inquiring glance, he asks in words which breathe Greek moderation, purity, and symmetry throughout,

What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape,
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady ?
 What men or gods are these ? What maidens loath ?
 What mad pursuit ? What struggle to escape ?
 What pipes and timbrels ? What wild ecstasy ?

* * * * *

Who are these coming to the sacrifice ?
 To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
 Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
 And all her silken flanks in garlands drest ?
 What little town by river or sea-shore,
 Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
 Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn ?
 And, little town, thy streets for evermore
 Will silent be ; and not a soul to tell
 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

Thirdly, Scott. Scott's imagery concerns mediæval romance and displays with great vividness two stable elements—motion and colour. These are the quintessence of Scott as a maker of poetical visions. The knights he describes act, as their creator wrote, fearlessly, joyously, rapidly. They are not effigies, armour-clad, now sitting awkwardly at the board, now riding uneasily to the fight, but are real flesh and blood, playing their parts so well that time glides back as we read and sets us in their midst. One of the most striking instances in which Scott uses motion with telling effect, is where he rings the doom-bell of the monk Eustace and Constance de Beverley, both condemned to death by the Superiors of Whitby Abbey. He is anxious to impress the knell on the memory and, had he pleased, he might have drawn his picture with Dantesque touch. He might have built up a mass of framework which quivered again as the huge bell, with bulk and weight accurately described, swung ponderously within. But the heart of effect is reached at a thrust, swiftly and unerringly. Taking the

line of sound Scott marks three points in it where something alive is resting, and at each point causes motion. It will be noticed, also, that as force is to be preserved, the most delicate ear is placed last and the most distant movement is the most pronounced ; thus, the laws of Natural Science are not violated as might at first be supposed.

To Warkworth cell the echoes roll'd
His beads the wakeful hermit told,
The Bamborough peasant raised his head,
 But slept ere half a prayer he said ;
 So far was heard the mighty knell
The stag sprung up on Cheviot Fell,
 Spread his broad nostril to the wind,
 Listed before, aside, behind,
 Then couch'd him down beside the hind,
 And quaked among the mountain fern,
 To hear that sound so dull and stern.

The procession of Roderick Dhu's barges on Loch Katrine shows the blending of motion and colour. The Briton's colour-sense is of Celtic source, and the value of Mr. Matthew Arnold's delightful lectures on Celtic Literature would be enhanced were this important matter discussed in them. Many mixed scenes of this nature have been painted by Scott, but we pass from such to a landscape which depends for its force on colour alone. I refer to the view of Edinburgh as seen from Blackford Hill. "Observe," says Mr. Ruskin, "The only hints at form given throughout are in the somewhat vague words, 'ridgy, massy, close and high,' the whole being still more obscured by modern mystery in its most tangible form of smoke. But the *colours* are all definite ; note the rainbow band of them—gloomy or dusky red, sable (pure black), amethyst (pure purple), green and gold—in a noble chord throughout."

Still on the spot Lord Marmion stay'd,
 For fairer scene he ne'er survey'd,
 When sated with the martial show
 That peopled all the plain below,
 The wandering eye could o'er it go,
 And mark the distant city glow
 With *gloomy splendour* red ;
 For on the smoke-wreaths, huge and slow,
 That round her *sable* turrets flow,
 The morning beams were shed,
 And tinged them with a lustre proud,
 Like that which streaks a thunder-cloud.

Such dusky grandeur clothed the height,
 Where the huge Castle holds its state,
 And all the steep slope down,
 Whose ridgy back heaves to the sky,
 Piled deep and massy, close and high,
 Mine own romantic town !
 But northward far, with purer blaze,
 On Ochil mountains fell the rays,
 And as each heathy top they kissed,
 It gleam'd a *purple* amethyst.
 Yonder the shores of Fife you saw ;
 Here Preston-Bay and Berwick-Law ;
 And broad between them roll'd
 The gallant Frith the eye might note,
 Whose islands on its bosom float,
 Like *emeralds* chased in *gold*.

It is often said that poets write as naturally as birds sing. Possibly birds sing because hereditary experience has brought ease and perfection, manifested from the beginning of life, but all poets depend on individual knowledge. Burns is one of these spontaneous singers to whom reference is constantly made. And yet what a store of lively, accurate, enduring knowledge about the things both great and small of the Lowland country had Burns. We are not satisfied with criticising paintings on the merit of general effect, but examine lines of detail and decry any faults we find. Something of value, something which separates poetasters from poets, will be discerned if we treat "spontaneous" poetry in the same manner. Poetry which discloses frequent weakness when tested line by line announces some failing in its maker. Let me close this paragraph, written to meet an objection to the general tone of the lecture, by jotting down a brief analysis of the first verse of a poem which appears to be, and is sometimes spoken of as being, of markedly spontaneous birth :--

Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,
 Thou's met me in an evil hour ;
 For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem :
 To spare thee now is past my power,
 Thou bonnie gem.

First line, two facts more or less botanical (wee, crimson-tipped), and an epithet (modest), deduced from the first fact; second line, gentle swell of the emotional wave; third line, the wave rises higher, and is coupled with a fact derived from general ob-

servation of Nature ; fourth line, another fact ; fifth line, the emotional wave, the first wave of the poem assumes a crest ; sixth line, a comprehensive image.

Lastly, poetry is a progressive art. Its method knows no change, but its thoughts, and their imagery take different complexions as time speeds. *E pur si muove* : this, says legend, was Galileo's utterance about the physical world. Of the mental and moral world these words are profoundly true : it moves, it moves. Poets feel *that* if they feel anything. They are not the first to feel it, John Stuart Mill thinks, when writing *Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties* ; but, allowing the point to remain moot, there can be no doubt as to their feeling it much more keenly than others. Their gifts, their unselfishness and their enthusiasm swiftly raise them above the aspiring throng. Rapidly they climb unto thrones whereon the strong light of heaven beats, cheered often by the knowledge that men love them, for the best of them have the word humanity graven deep on their hearts ; cheered, too, by the knowledge that they will in the end receive such homage as kings crave in vain. And we, if we would gaze upon them clearly and steadfastly, with a love time cannot dim or make mere seeming, if we would be unwaveringly loyal, must own in our very souls that not our love merely, not our loyalty merely, but also our charity to all people will be fashioned more nobly and more effectively by humbly studying the untold beauties of Poetry, as a Fine Art.



